

NSC BRIEFING

17 December 1958

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MIDDLE EAST DEVELOPMENTS

State Department review
completed

- I. Iraqi Communists are putting on bigger and better demonstrations, with apparent double barreled purpose of whipping up popular sentiment against the United States and intimidating Qasim from moving against them or from seeking outside help to do so.
 - A. In talk with Asst. Secretary Rountree on Tuesday, Qasim appeared tense and not wholly convinced US innocent of conspiring against him. Reiterated his wish for friendship with US "as with all nations" but indicated no move on his part to improve relations.
 - B. Rountree's arrival provided occasion for new round in Communists' campaign of demonstrations. Their immediate internal targets are pro-BAK elements and military.
 1. In Basra, Iraq's port on Persian Gulf on 8 December a *was besieged by a mob* military garrison and authorities lost control of town for a matter of hours.
 2. Qasim may now be--or is rapidly getting into--position where he dare not strike at Communists for fear they will join other hostile elements against him.
 - C. This situation may lead army leaders, especially divisional commanders who have previously indicated disgruntlement with Communist influence, to move against Qasim.

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II. Iraq situation has brought Nasir up against dilemma long implicit in his Arab neutralist position: how can he maintain his position against Communist influence elsewhere in the Arab world while relying essentially on the Soviet Union for military and diplomatic support against Israel? If he attacks Communists in Iraq, will the USSR accept the distinction Nasir makes in Egypt between Soviet policy and local Communist parties? If the USSR turns the screws, does Nasir dare denounce them and seek protection from the West?

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A.

Nasir also spoke in troubled manner to Rountree on subject of Iraq, saying he knew how to handle Communists in Egypt but not in other countries and asking for our "ideas."

B. He is allowing--or rather inspiring--some tentative press attacks on the Iraqi Communists.

1. For past week these attacks have appeared in UAR-subsidized press in Beirut.

2. On 13 December, Cairo paper published by a Nasir confidant gave some play to anti-UAR activity by Iraqi Communists, and Damascus press and radio opened up on this subject this week, saying a dangerous "left" tendency has appeared in Arab nationalist movement.

III. Arab-Israel problem remains in background as far as Nasir concerned; he did not mention it during talks last week with Rountree.

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B. Israelis have continued to utter warnings that failure of UN to act, or at least clearly condemn UAR for 3 December border incident, would force them to rely on their own resources. Israelis obviously expected nothing from UN, however, and were merely talking for record.

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- C. Interesting feature of recent Israeli diplomatic campaign was support it received from British.
1. British UN rep said this week the UK was in "close touch" with Israelis on the situation.
 2. UK-Israeli relations closer since Tel Aviv allowed UK paratroops to overfly to Jordan last July; London has sold two submarines to Israel and is arranging to sell 60 tanks.
 3. British have, however, urged US to caution Israelis against military action and say they have done the same.
- D. Worth noting, too, that Israeli French relations remain close. Israeli chief of staff Laskov, intelligence chief Harkabi, and director general of defense ministry Peres all visited Paris recently. Peres conferred with Boustelle and Guy Mollet.

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Approved For Release 2005/06/01 : CIA-RDP79R00890A001000080004-4

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